

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 18498 232015Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 BIB-01 ACDA-12 IO-13 TRSE-00 /085 W
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R 231600Z DEC 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5997
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 18498

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, UR
SUBJ: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENTS: BREZHNEV STILL ABSENT

SUMMARY: BREZHNEV CONTINUES TO BE ABSENT FROM PUBLIC VIEW, APPARENTLY RECOVERING FROM THE FLU. HIS BIRTHDAY (DECEMBER 19) PASSED WITHOUT OFFICIAL NOTICE, ALTHOUGH THE "CULT OF BREZHNEV" CONTINUES APACE. LEADERSHIP SEATING AND INTERACTION AT THE DECEMBER 21 RSFSR SUPREME SOVIET SESSION PRODUCED SOME INSIGHTS TO THE LEADERSHIP PECKING ORDER. END SUMMARY.

1. BREZHNEV MISSED THE DECEMBER 21 RSFSR SUPREME SOVIET SESSION, AS DID HIS SENIOR POLITBURO COLLEAGUES KOSYGIN AND SUSLOV. AS DURING THE DECEMBER 14-16 SUPREME SOVIET SESSION, BREZHNEV'S SEAT ON THE DAIS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 MOSCOW 18498 232015Z

WAS LEFT EMPTY, AND HE RECEIVED THE USUAL AMOUNTS OF PERSONAL PRAISE FROM THE VARIOUS SPEAKERS.

2. BREZHNEV'S DECEMBER 19 BRITHDAY PASSED WITHOUT OFFICIAL NOTICE, ALTHOUGH THE NINE P.M. NEWS PROGRAM "VREMYA" OFFERED SOMETHING OF A BIRTHDAY PRESENT THAT EVENING BY CARRYING, AT THE TOP OF THE SHOW, A FOUR-

MINUTE SEGMENT DEVOTED TO THE SECOND EDITION OF BREZHNEV'S ILLUSTRATED BIOGRAPHY, AS WELL AS TO THE PUBLICATION OF AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE VERSION OF THE BIOGRAPHY.

3. THE PROGRAM INCLUDED A TAPED INTERVIEW WITH THE PUBLISHER OF THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE VERSION, ROBERT MAXWELL, WHO SAID ALL THE RIGHT THINGS (FROM THE SOVIET VIEWPOINT) ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VOLUME. IT WAS ANNOUNCED DURING THE PROGRAM THAT ON DECEMBER 19 MAXWELL PRESENTED CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER (AND CLOSE BREZHNEV ASSOCIATE) CHERNENKO WITH A FIRST EDITION OF THE BOOK, FOR TRANSMISSION TO BREZHNEV.

4. ON DECEMBER 20, FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO RECEIVED MAXWELL FOR A DISCUSSION OF THE BOOK'S SIGNIFICANCE. IN SHORT, ALTHOUGH BREZHNEV CONTINUES TO BE CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT FROM PUBLIC VIEW, THE CULT OF BREZHNEV SEEMS TO BE DOING WELL IN HIS ABSENCE.

5. AS REPORTED SEPTELS, WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT BREZHNEV HAD THE FLU AND IS CURRENTLY RECOVERING SUCCESSFULLY, AND WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT THIS.

6. EMBOFF'S ATTENDANCE AT THE OPENING, TWO-HOUR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 MOSCOW 18498 232015Z

RSFSR SUPREME SOVIET MEETING DECEMBER 21 RESULTED IN THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE SEATING ARRANGEMENT OF THE PARTY LEADERSHIP:
-- THE FIRST ROW OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP SEATS ON THE DAIS WAS OCCUPIED BY KIRILENKO, PEL'SHE, AND KULAKOV:
-- TWO SEATS WERE LEFT EMPTY TO KIRILENKO'S LEFT: ONE OF THE EMPTY PLACES (THE ONE ON THE AISLE) CLEARLY WAS BREZHNEV'S: THE OTHER EMPTY PLACE OF HONOR SEEMED A SILENT REMINDER THAT KIRILENKO IS NOT NUMBER TWO IN TERMS OF PRESENT LEADERSHIP PECKING ORDER (HE IS USUALLY PRECEDED BY BOTH KOSYGIN AND SUSLOV, BUT PROBABLY SOMEONE IN AUTHORITY DECIDED IT WOULD LOOK UNSEEMLY TO LEAVE THREE SEATS EMPTY);
-- SEATING IN THE SECOND AND THIRD ROWS WAS IN ACCORD WITH USUAL PRACTICE.

7. OTHER OBSERVATIONS MADE DURING THE MEETING MAY PROVIDE SOME INSIGHT TO LEADERSHIP INTERACTION:
-- KIRILENKO CLEARLY WAS THE SENIOR MAN PRESENT: MESSENGERS SEVERAL TIMES BROUGHT HIM FILES WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY WERE PASSED TO OTHER FULL POLITBURO MEMBERS:

-- AS WE HAVE OBSERVED DURING OTHER SUPREME SOVIET MEETINGS, CHERNENKO WAS BUSY IN HIS ROLE AS ADMINISTRATOR, ENSURING THAT FILES WERE PASSED PROPERLY, DISPATCHING MESSENGERS, AND IN ONE INSTANCE TAKING DICTATION FROM KIRILENKO AND THEN FURRYING OUT OF THE HALL:

-- CHERNENKO OBVIOUSLY HAS SPECIAL STANDING AS MANAGER OF THE PAPER FLOW: IN ONE CASE A MESSENGER BROUGHT KIRILENKO A BRIGHT RED FOLDER CONTAINING SEVERAL BATCHES OF PAPER: AFTER READING AND INITIALING EACH BATCH, KIRILENKO PASSED THE FOLDER TO PEL'SHE: PEL'SHE, HAVING DULY READ AND INITIALED, PASSED THE FOLDER TO KULAKOV: WHEN KULAKOV HAD FINISHED WITH THE PAPERS, HE HANDED THE FOLDER TO

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 MOSCOW 18498 232015Z

CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER CHERNENKO, WHO GALANCED AT THE MATERIAL AND THEN SUMMONED A MESSENGER, WHO IN TURN TOOK THE PACKAGE TO GRISHIN (CUTTING OUT CANDIDATE POLITBURO MEMBER SOLOMENTSEV, WHO COULD EASILY HAVE PASSED THE FOLDER FROM CHERNENKO TO GRISHIN): THE MESSENGER CAREFULLY WATCHED THE FURTHER PROGRESS OF THE FOLDER, AS IT WAS PASSED FROM GRISHIN TO MAZUROV, GROMYKO, ANDROPOV AND USTINOV: THE MESSENGER STOOD BEHIND USTINOV AS THE LATTER READ THE DOCUMENTS: WHEN USTINOV FINISHED, THE MESSENGER TOOK THE FOLDER (CLEARLY INTENDED ONLY FOR FULL POLITBURO MEMBERS) AND LEFT THE HALL:

-- AS ON OTHER SIMILAR OCCASIONS, ANDROPOV SPENT MUCH OF THE MEETING CHATTING ANIMATEDLY WITH GROMYKO AND USTINOV:

-- GRISHIN AND PEL'SHE WERE LARGELY IGNORED BY THEIR NEIGHBORS: DURING ONE EPISODE, KIRILENKO AND KULAKOV CONDUCTED A LENGTHY CONVERSATION VIRTUALLY UNDER PEL'SHE'S NOSE (PEL'SHE SAT BETWEEN THE TWO), WHILE PEL'SHE, OBVIOUSLY NOT INCLUDED IN THE EXCHANGE, STARED SILENTLY INTO SPACE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, HEALTH, POLITICAL LEADERS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MOSCOW18498
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770480-0884
Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771222/aaaaarxq.tel
Line Count: 157
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Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
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Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 139487
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENTS: BREZHNEV STILL ABSENT SUMMARY: BREZHNEV CONTINUES TO BE ABSENT FROM PUBLIC VIEW, APPARENTLY RECOVERING FROM THE FLU. HIS BI RT
TAGS: PINT, UR, (BREZHNEV, LEONID IL'ICH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f3bfcafd-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009